A Home Near Extinction

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In Guru Granth Sahib *Shabads* are grouped under the headers *Raag, Mahalla* and *Ghar.* These headers can be compared to road signs through which the Gurus are conveying the following message:

Raag – Prescribed music *(Raag)* to be used for singing the *Shabad* so that the feeling conveyed by the Music complements the message to be conveyed by the *Shabad*.

Mahalla – As all *Shabads* are written in the name of Nanak because all the 10 Gurus were the same *jot* (spirit) of Guru Nanak, hence the numeral with the word *Mahalla* is used to indicate the physical body of the Guru who wrote the Shabad. These numerals range between 1 to 5 and 9.

Ghar - Gurbani is written in poetical Metric (time measurement) form. The Metric of poetry emerges in the form of *Taal* (Beat) when it is sung in the form of *Gurbani Keertan*. The numeral with the word *Ghar* used in the Guru Granth Sahib ranges between 1 and 17 and is the code

indicating the *Taal* (Beat) to be played while singing the Shabad.

It is unfortunate that present day *Raagis* have totally forgotten the science behind the usage of *Ghar* in Guru Granth Sahib. Today there seems to be no consensus in the Sikh *panth* on the message conveyed through *Ghars.* But a detailed study of texts written by noted Sikh Musicologists and well-known authors reveals that there is enough information currently available to draw inference on this subject. Doubts can be removed by examining the nitty-gritty of the subject through these texts.

Upon examining available texts it is found that there are only 2 prevalent opinions about the meaning of *Ghar*. Some believe that *Ghar* means *Taal* (Beat) while others believe it indicates the Note with which the tune of the *Raag*, in which the *Shabad* is to be sung, should start.

No one has yet been able to logically co-relate the Numerals of the *Ghars* with the latter suggestion that *Ghar* indicates the Note with which the tune of the *Raag* should start. This is because under the rules of Indian Classical music a *Raag* should have a minimum 5 or a maximum of 12 Notes, otherwise it can't be a *Raag*. Since in Guru Granth Sahib the numerals of *Ghars* range between 1 and 17, therefore 1 to 4 and 13 to 17 numerals will not fall under the rules of Classical music. It is because of the lack of logic in

being able to co-relate the *Ghar* numerals with Notes that this opinion doesn't find much acceptance.

Noted Sikh Keertanias and personalities of the past have interpreted *Ghar* as *Taal* (Beat) only.

We must first understand few terminologies associated with the *Taal* (Beat) before understanding the relation between *Ghar* and *Taal*.

Taal – This is the unit for measuring the time taken to complete the musical cyclic period.
Matra **(ਮਾਤਰਾ)** – The smallest unit of time that group together to form a *Taal* (Beat). These are represented by Numerals **1,2,3,4…….**

Lay**(ਲੈਅ)** – The constant speed in which the *Taal* (Beat) moves ahead in a *Shabad*.

Sum **(ਸੱਮ) –** The *Matra* from where the *Taal* (Beat) begins. This is also known as *Gur* (**ਗੁਰ**) and is the *Matra* where beat player and the singer exert maximum force. This is the *Matra* where the listener would also exert the maximum rhythmic force by clapping their hands. This is represented by an **X**.

Taali **(ਤਾਲੀ) –** Apart from Sum (**ਸੱਮ**) these are the other *Matras* in the *Taal* (Beat) cycle where a force slightly less than the maximum, is exerted by beat player and the

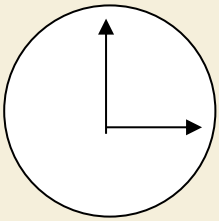
singer. These are the *Matras* where the listener would also exert a rhythmic force slightly less than the maximum, by clapping their hands. A point to note is that *Sum* (**ਸੱਮ**) is also counted as a *Taali* and the only difference between this and other *Taalis* is that at the *Sum* (**ਸੱਮ**) maximum force is exerted, denoting the start of the beat, whereas force slightly less than the maximum is exerted on other *Taalis.* These are represented by the numerals 1,2,3,4….. However, these numerals are different from the numerals used for the representing the *Matras*.

***Khaali* (ਖਾਲੀ)** – Normally this is the *Matra* that falls at the mid-point of a *Taal* (Beat). This is the place after which the least force is exerted while playing the beat. This is represented by an **O**.

We can illustrate the above terminologies with the help of the Seconds needle of a clock.

X *Sum* (**ਸੱਮ**)
This is also the 1st *Taali*

Taali (**ਤਾਲੀ**) **3**
This is 3rd Taali



2 *Taali* (**ਤਾਲੀ**)
This is 2nd Taali

O *Khaali* (Kwll)

Let us divide the clock into 4 quadrants. The seconds needle starts its journey from X, which is the first *Taali* and therefore known as the *Sum* (**ਸੱਮ**). The seconds needle keeps ticking at equal time interval of 1 second, which can be known as *Matras*. After 15 *Matras*, it reaches the second *Taali*. After another 15 *Matras* it reaches the mid-point of the 1-minute time cycle, which is known as the *Khaali*. It then moves to the 3rd *Taali* and then returns back to the *Sum* (**ਸੱਮ**), to restart the same cycle once again. This one minute time cycle can be called a *Taal*, which will comprise of 60 *Matras*. In this case the equal time of 1 minute between each successive Beat is known as *Lay* (**ਲੈਅ**).

The actual meaning of the common Punjabi word *ghar* is house/home.

Let us take the example of our daily life to explain the meaning of *ghar* in Guru Granth Sahib. Our day-to-day life is also cyclic in nature, like the *teen-taal* (16 *matra* beat). In the morning we get up at home to accomplish the daily tasks and in the night return back home to rest and then restart the same routine the next day. Hence, our home is the place from where our daily cyclic routine begins. Our home could be represented as the point X (*sum* – **ਸੱਮ**) in our daily cyclic life, where extra force is applied in a beat. This extra force is akin to us getting up in the morning with a fresh bout of full energy. This is also the 1st *taali*. We then accomplish some daily routine tasks, like starting office

work at 9 AM, breaking for lunch at 1 PM, closing work at 5 PM to return back home.

Staring office work at 9 AM is akin to 2nd *taali*, where a force is applied, although it is slightly less than the force at the *sum* (**ਸੱਮ**), in organizing our official tasks to be accomplished for the day.

Breaking for Lunch at 1 PM is akin to the *khaali* because this is the mid-point of the Beat and immediately after this *matra* comes the least force. Lunch represents our mid-point of the day and the post-lunch laziness is similar to the lowest force applied in the daily cycle.

Closing the work at 5 PM brings in another bout of energy because the feeling of being back home with family brings excitement. This is akin to the 3rd *taali* of the Beat, where a force is again applied.

Once back home we rest for the night and restart the same routine the next morning, which is akin to restarting the Beat from the *sum* (**ਸੱਮ**).

The key to understanding the meaning of *ghar* lies in the above example. It takes 3 landmarks (or *taalis*) in our daily life to return back home to be able to restart the same

routine the next day. Therefore this cycle is known as ***ghar 3***.

Ghar 3 stands for *teen-taal* as it takes 3 *taalis* to return to the beginning of the beat.

The *taals* denoted by *ghar* 1 – 17 in Guru Granth Sahib are:

GHAR 1 - *DADRA TAAL*
(Takes 1 *Taali* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has *6 Maatraas*)
GHAR 2 - *RUPAK TAAL*
(Takes 2 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 7 *Maatraas*)
GHAR 3 - *TEEN TAAL*
(Takes 3 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 16 *Maatraas*)
GHAR 4 - *CHAAR TAAL*
(Takes 4 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 12 Maatraas)
GHAR 5 - *PUNJ TAAL*
(Takes 5 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 15 Maatraas)
GHAR 6 - *KHUT TAAL*
(Takes 6 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 18 Maatraas)
GHAR 7 - *MUT TAAL*
(Takes 7 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 21 Maatraas)
GHAR 8 - *ASHT MANGAL TAAL*
(Takes 8 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 22 Maatraas)
GHAR 9 - *MOHINI TAAL*
(Takes 9 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 23 Maatraas)
GHAR 10 - *BRAHAM TAAL*
(Takes 10 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 28 Maatraas)
GHAR 11 - *RUDRA TAAL*
(Takes 11 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 32 Maatraas)
GHAR 12 - *VISHNU TAAL*

(Takes 12 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 36 Maatraas)
GHAR 13 - *MUCHKUND TAAL*
(Takes 13 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 34 Maatraas)
GHAR 14 - *MAHASHANI TAAL*
(Takes 14 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 42 Maatraas)
GHAR 15 - *MISHR BARAN TAAL*
(Takes 15 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 47 Maatraas)
GHAR 16 - *KUL TAAL*
(Takes 16 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 42 Maatraas)
GHAR 17 - *CHRCHARI TAAL*
(Takes 17 *Taalis* to return to *Sum*. The Beat has 40 Maatraas)

For the purpose of providing further clarity through examples, the notation of *ghar* 1 is also given below.

DADRA-TAAL

Ghar 1 stands for *dadra-taal* as it takes one *taali* to return to the beginning of the beat.

Taali/Khaali	X			0		
Sound to be played	Dha	Dhin	Dha	Dha	Tin	Ta
Matra	1	2	3	4	5	6

Now we may wonder as to why have we have lost this knowledge of *ghars*?

The reason is that in the olden days, it was the *mridang* and not the current days' *tabla* that was used as a percussion

accompaniment for *keertan* singing. *Mridang* has a very heavy sound and it was used to play highly complex and lengthy *taals*. *Tabla* is an adaptation from *mridang*, whereby it was cut into 2 halves to make the 2 portions of the *tabla*. In the eighteenth century the *Khyal, Thumri, Tappa* and *Gazals* dominated the Indian Musical scene. These styles of singing did not require a heavy percussion instrument and neither did they require lengthy beat cycles. *Tabla* was an ideal accompanying instrument for the light popular styles of eighteenth century music. So *mridang* started loosing its importance. At the same time the Harmonium, which is an adaptation of English instrument and not ideally suited for Indian classical music, started dominating over string instruments.

With the ousting of string instruments from the *keertan* singing, the usage of prescribed *raags* for *Gurbani* singing were replaced by simple catchy tunes which did not require *mridang* as an accompanying percussion instrument. Hence, *mridang* was totally removed from the *Gurudwaras* just like the string instruments. With its removal, and the importance given to simple catchy tunes, there was no more need to either play the lengthy *taals* on the *tabla.* Soon, *Gurbani Keertan* was restricted to handful of simple *taals* like *Keharva, Teen-Taal, Dadra, Rupak* and *Ek Taal*.

Music is an Art, which can be preserved over generations, if and only if it is actively practiced. If not, it is soon lost like the morning dew.

This is the reason for the current society of Sikhs not being aware of the meaning of *ghars*.

Some of the books that can be read to gain further insight on the subject of *ghars* are given below:

1) Gurmat Sangeet Sagar (4 Volumes) – Principal Dayal Singh
2) Gurbani Sangeet Prachin Sangeet Ratnavali (2 Volumes) – Bhai Avtar Singh & Bhai Gurcharan Singh
3) Gurbani Sangeet (2 Volumes) – Gyan Singh
4) Gurbani Sangeet Darpan – Professor Kartar Singh
5) Sur Simran Sangeet (7 Volumes) – Sant Sarvan Singh 'Gandharv'
6) Bani Beura – Charan Singh
7) Mahan Kosh – Bhai Kahn Singh